

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03493 01 OF 03 201340Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BEIRUT 3493

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FOR SECRETARY FROM BROWN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, EGEN, LE

SUBJECT: WHAT NEXT FOR LEBANON?

1. SUMMARY: THIS CABLE ATTEMPTS TO SET FORTH SOME OF THE PROBLEMS
A NEW LEBANESE GOVERNMENT WILL CONFRONT ON WHICH IT WILL HAVE TO ACT.
ADDED TOGETHER, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, SECURITY AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS
ARE QUITE DEPRESSING. IT WILL TAKE BETTER LEADERSHIP THAN WE HAVE
SEEN IN THE PAST IN LEBANON. ALL THIS IS PREDICATED ON THE ASSUMP-
TION THAT THE GENERALLY AGREED TO PROCESS OF INSTALLING A NEW PRESI-
DENT WILL MOVE FORWARD, PERHAPS BY FITS AND STARTS, BUT THAT IT
WILL SOMEHOW WORK. END SUMMARY.

2. THE CONCLUSION THAT STANDS OUT MOST VIVIDLY IS THAT AN ENORMOUS
BUNDLE OF PROBLEMS WILL SUDDENLY FALL ON THE SHOULDERS OF THE
UNLUCKY MAN SELECTED AS PRESIDENT. THESE WILL BE NOT ONLY PROBLEMS
INHERENT IN HIS LONG-TERM TASK OF RESURRECTING LEBANON, BUT ALSO
ONES DELIBERATELY POSTPONED FROM THE PRESENT PERIOD. FOR REASONS
OF POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY, FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS CONSIDERED BEST TO
SWEEP THE ISSUE OF POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING UNDER THE RUG WHILE THE
PRESIDENTIAL "CAMPAIGN" GOES ON. THE DIFFICULTY IS THAT SUCH
QUESTIONS FALLING ON TOP OF OTHERS MAY GIVE THE PRESIDENT TOO OVER-
WHELMING A TASK ALL AT ONCE. THE ISSUES FACING THE NEW PRESIDENT
WILL FALL INTO THREE GENERAL AREAS: (A) RESTORING SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY; (B) POLITICAL REFORMS; (C) RECONSTRUC-
TION.

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03493 01 OF 03 201340Z

RM RESTORING SECURITY AND GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY: YOU CANNOT BE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT AN EARLY RENEWAL OF LAW AND ORDER AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF AUTHORITY THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE. LEBANON TODAY IS A LAND OF "TURFS" RUN (WHEN RUN AT ALL) BY ARMED GROUPS. THESE ARE OFTEN MUTUALLY HOSTILE. CLASHES CAN ARISE AT THE DROP OF A HAT -- ESPECIALLY, BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY, ACROSS THE CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM DIVIDING LINES. THE SLIGHTEST INCIDENT CAN SPARK A BIG BLOW-UP. PROVOCATEURS OF ONE EXTREME OR THE OTHER ARE ALWAYS READY TO PROVIDE THE SPARK. EXTREMISTS OF THE LEFT AND PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS ARE A PARTICULAR MENACE. WHEN ONE ADDS TO THIS THE EASE WITH WHICH OUTSIDE POWERS SUCH AS LIBYA, IRAQ, AND EGYPT CAN STIMULATE INTRANSIGENCE IN VARIOUS GROUPS AND PARTIES, THE DIFFICULTY OF RESTORING EVEN A MINIMUM OF SECURITY IS APPARENT.

5. FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD, SYRIA WILL HAVE TO PROVIDE THE COVER FOR THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S RENEWAL. ALONG WITH THIS, DE FACTO PARTITION WILL HAVE TO BE ACCEPTED, AS CHRISTIAN MILITIAS POLICE CHRISTIAN AREAS AND THE DISPARATE AND NOT ALWAYS MUTUALLY FRIENDLY MOSLEMS/LEFTIST/PALESTINIAN GROUPS POLICE THE REST. THE RESTBRED HIGHER MILITARY COMMITTEE PROVIDES THE FRAMEWORK FOR THIS SCHEME; SOMETHING LIKE IT WILL HAVE TO BE CONCOCTED AFTER THE NEW PRESIDENT IS ELECTED. THE OVER-ALL PURPOSE WILL BE TO ELIMINATE THE DE FACTO PARTITION AND THE SYRIAN COVER GRADUALLY, PUTTING IN THEIR PLACE A NEW LEBANESE AUTHORITY. SETBACKS ARE PROBABLY INEVITABLE, BUT HOPEFULLY MANAGEABLE. ANY SIGNIFICANT DOWNTURN IN SECURITY IS APT TO MAKE CHRISTIAN HARDLINERS FREEZE.

6. THE GOL NOT LONGER HAS ANY SERVICE CAPABLE OF MAINTAINING INTERNAL SECURITY. POLICE FORCE CANNOT BE RE-ORGANIZED AND GIVEN CAPABILITY OF SUPPRESSING INSURRECTION QUICKLY ENOUGH. POLARIZATION OF THE ARMY HAS INCREASED DURING LATEST ROUND OF FIGHTING, AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION AS A NATIONAL ARMY WOULD TAKE AT LEAST TWO YEARS. HOWEVER, A MOBILE BRIGADE MIGHT BE READY IN 6-12 MONTHS. IN THE INTERIM, AN EXTERNAL MILITARY FORCE WOULD BE REQUIRED TO RESTORE LAW AND ORDER, PENDING DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL CAPABILITY, OR IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO REACH AGREEMENT ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PROVISIONAL FORCE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03493 01 OF 03 201340Z

FROM THE VARIOUS WARRING FACTIONS.

7. A LATENT PROBLEM LIKELY TO ARISE WHEN THE BARE BONES OF AUTHORITY ARE RECREATED IS LEBANESE NATIONAL FEELING AGAINST SYRIA. THE DEFEATIST MOOD OF MOST LEBANESE TODAY PROBABLY GIVES DAMSACUS SOME TIME BEFORE THIS WILL BECOME A MAJOR PROBLEM, BUT IS IS AN EVER-PRESENT FEELING AND MUST BE EXPECTED TO EMERGE IN FORCE. BOTH RIGHTISTS

AND LEFTISTS MAY VOICE IT, ALTHOUGH FOR DIFFERENT REASONS (RIGHTISTS SPEAKING OF LEBANESE "SOVERIGNTY" AND LEFTISTS CONSIDERING DAMASCUS AS A TRAITOR TO THE "PROGRESSIVE" CAUSE). THIS OF COURSE STRENGTHENS THE ARGUMENT FOR AN EARLY DEPARTURE OF SYRIAN MILITARY INFLUENCE. DAMASCUS WILL HAVE TO PLAY ITS GAME VERY CAREFULLY, STEERING CLEAR OF A DEPARTURE SO ABRUPT THAT IT LEAVES A POWER VACUUM AND ONE SO DELAYED THAT IT CREATES SUSPICION OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN THE MINDS OF LEBANESE. (WITH THE NEW SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN ACCORD ON LEBANON, WHERE THE PALESTINIANS ASSUME A GREATER ROLE FOR SECURITY, THIS SUSPICION COULD WELL BE TRANSFERRED TO THE LATTER.)

8. POLITICAL REFORMS. OF ALL THE PROBLEMS DUMPED ON THE NEW PRESIDENT, NONE WILL BE MORE THORNY THAN THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL REFORM. WHEN FRANGIE ANNOUNCED HIS 17- POINT PROGRAM IN FEBRUARY, THIS WAS FONDLY THOUGHT TO BE THE BASIS FOR THE "NEW LEBANON". IT CONTAINED MAINLY POLITICAL CHANGES AND INVOLVED CONCESSIONS FROM BOTH CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS. DESPITE GRUMBLINGS BY THE LEFT ABOUT SOME OF THE POINTS, LEFTISTS WERE AT FIRST UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE ACQUIESCED. NOW THIS IS ALL UP IN THE AIR. IT HAS BEEN LEFT THAT WAY BY TACIT AGREEMENT, ON THEORY THAT ELECTION OF NEW PRESIDENT SHOULD NOT BE COMPLICATED BY SUCH INTRACTABLE ISSUES.

9. THE HOPE IS THAT DEPARTURE OF FRANGIE WILL CLEAR THE AIR POLITICALLY AND ALLOW NEW MAN TO PUSH REFORMS WITH BROAD PUBLIC SUPPORT. THERE IS CERTAINLY BASIS FOR THIS HOPE. MAKING "SCAPEGOAT" OF FRANGIE WILL HELP CLEANSE SYSTEM SYMBOLICALLY OF OLD POLITICAL MENTALITY. HOWEVER, MORE IS INVOLVED THAN JUST PERSONALITIES. WRAPPED UP IN FRANGIE'S 17 POINTS ARE GUT ISSUES INVOLVING

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BEIRUT 03493 01 OF 03 201340Z

STRONG FEELINGS ON ALL SIDES. IT TOOK LABORIOUS NEGOTIATING TO ARRIVE AT 17 POINTS LAST FEBRUARY. ON CHRISTIAN SIDE, THEY EMBODIED "MINIMUM" GUARANTEE OF THEIR POLITICAL FUTURE WHILE GIVING LONG-SOUGHT GAINS TO MOSLEMS. ESTABLISH-

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03493 02 OF 03 201354Z

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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 2 OF 3 BEIRUT 3493

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MENT-MINDED CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS WERE BASICALLY SATISIFIED WITH THE ACCORD. JUMBLATT, WHO HAS LONG CONSIDERED POLITICAL REFORM THE SPEARHEAD OF HIS PROGRAM, LATER MADE IT CLEAR HE WAS NOT SATISFIED. HE HAS BEEN A KEY FIGURE IN EROSION OF FRANGIE'S PROGRAM SINCE EARLY MARCH (ALTHOUGH HE GOT UNEXPECTED HELP FROM AHDAB'S COUP AND CANNOT FORGET HIS DEBT TO PALESTINIAN MUSCLE ON BATTLEFIELD). HE WILL CONTINUE TO PUSH FOR REVISION OF THE 17 POINTS. DESPITE THEIR REVERSSES IN BATTLE, CHRISTIAN RIGHTISTS WILL STRUGGLE TO PRESERVE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE OF "GUARANTEE" TO WHICH THEY ADHERE EMOTIONALLY. TRADITIONAL MOSLEMS, IN PART THROUGH WEAKNESS AND IN PART THROUGH SECURITY THEY FEEL THAT DEMANDS WON WILL STICK, MAY SIT ON SIDELINES EXCEPT ON ISSUE OF SECULARIZATION. ALL IN ALL, THE NEW PRESIDENT'S PATH WILL LEAD STRAIGHT THROUGH A POLITICAL MINEFIELD. YET HE CANNOT AVOID CROSSING IT IF HE HOPES TO REACH THE "NEW LEBANON" THAT EVERYBODY DEMANDS.

10. FORTUNATELY, THE MINEFIELD IS NOT UNCHARTED. THE 17 POINTS WERE THE OUTGROWTH OF AN EARLIER SET OF 5 POINTS HAMMERED OUT IN LATE 1975 THROUGH SYRIAN MEDIATION. FOUR OF THESE POINTS WERE POLITICAL: (A) EQUAL CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT; (B) NAMING OF PRIME MINISTER BY THE PARLIAMENT; (C) ABOLITION OF CONFESSIONALISM IN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT; (D) ESTABLISHMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL COURT. A SEPARATE POINT STATING THE PALESTINIANS WOULD ABIDE BY CARIRO AGREEMENT ALSO EMERGED LATER AS A COROLLARY TO THE 17 POINTS. THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03493 02 OF 03 201354Z

LEFT'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE 5 POINTS WAS LESS AMBIGUOUS THAN IT EVER WAS FOR FRANGIE'S PROGRAM. THERE IS ALSO INDICATION THAT IT WOULD ACCEPT THE TRADITION OF A MARONITE PRESIDENT, A SUNNI PREMIER AND A SHIITE SPEAKER FOR THE TIME BEING, ALTHOUGH THIS HAS NOT BEEN MADE TOO CLEAR. BY FOCUSING

ON THESE MORE FIRMLY ACCEPTED POINTS, THE NEW PRESIDENT COULD HOPE TO GET POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS REASONABLY FAR ALONG WITHOUT MISHAP.

11. HIS MAIN PROBLEMS WOULD BE THREE, AS WE SEE IT:
(A) THE PARTS OF THE 17 POINTS REPRESENTING COUNTER-CONCESSIONS TO CHRISTIANS; (B) THE EXTENT OF DECONFESIONALIZATION IN THE GOVERNMENT; (C) THE FUTURE OF THE PALESTINIANS. THE FIRST OF THESE ISSUES CENTERS ESPECIALLY ON A PROVISION IN FRANGIE'S PROGRAM THAT A TWO-THIRDS VOTE WILL BE NEEDED IN PARLIAMENT ON UNSPECIFIED "IMPORTANT MATTERS" AND THAT A 55-0/0 VOTE WILL BE NEEDED TO ELECT A PRESIDENT ON THE SECOND AND SUBSEQUENT BALLOTS (TWO-THIRDS ALREADY BEING REQUIRED ON THE FIRST BALLOT). THE LEFT HAS OBJECTED TO THE 55-0/0 IDEA. ITS RETENTION SYMBOLIZES FOR CHRISTIANS THEIR FUTURE POLITICAL SAFETY AND WE EXPECT THEY WILL HOTLY CONTEST ITS BEING DROPPED. ON THE DECONFESIONALIZATION ISSUE, THE 17 POINTS MOVED SIGNIFICANTLY AWAY FROM CONFESIONALISM BUT KEPT IT FOR POSTS OF DIRECTOR GENERAL LEVEL AND ABOVE. AS FOR THE PALESTINIANS, IT WAS A QUESTION EVEN UNDER THE 17 POINTS HOW FAR THEY WOULD AGREE TO GO BACK TO THE CAIRO AGREEMENT. THIS IS STILL A MAJOR UNKNOWN. (IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW THE CAIRO AGREEMENT CAN BE OBSERVED IF THE PALESTINIANS HAVE A MAJOR POLICING ROLE, AS IS NOW THE CASE.)
IN THESE STRUGGLES, MUCH WILL DEPEND ON THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN JUMBLATT AND THE EXTREMISTS IN HIS CAMP AND ON THE EVEN MORE TRICKY INTERACTIONS INVOLVING ARAFAT, SAIQA AND THE REJECTIONISTS AMONG THE PALESTINIANS. THE ATTITUDE OF THE "CHRISTIAN REJECTION FRONT" ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE MAY ALSO COMPLICATE THINGS.

12. AN IDEA THAT THE NEW PRESIDENT COULD USEFULLY PICK UP IS THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DEFUNCT NATIONAL DIALOGUE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03493 02 OF 03 201354Z

COMMITTEE, OR SOMETHING RESEMBLING IT. HONORING IT MIGHT MOLLIFY HIM TEMPORARILY AND THEREBY GIVE THE PRESIDENT TIME TO SORT OUT THE ISSUES. THE DIALOGUE TECHNIQUE IS, IN FACT, MORE THAN JUST A GIMMICK. THE COMMITTEE THAT MET LAST AUTUMN PROVIDED A FORUM FOR AIRING SENSITIVE ISSUES, SOMETHING THAT MAY BE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD. THE MAIN PITFALL IS THAT SUCH A GROUP CAN PLAUSIBLY BE SAID TO UNDERMINE PARLIAMENT'S AUTHORITY. THIS CLAIM WAS MADE ABOUT THE EARLIER COMMITTEE. BUT THIS SHOULD NOT BE AN IMPOSSIBLE OBJECTION TO OVERCOME IN THESE CRITICAL TIMES THAT REQUIRE EXTRA-ORDINARY METHODS.

13. RECONSTRUCTION. THE PUBLIC SECTOR WILL BE OBLIGED TO PLAY AN UNPRECEDENTED ROLE IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LEBANON, FIRST BECAUSE OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE JOB TO BE DONE, SECONDLY BECAUSE THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS NO LONGER PREPARED TO ASSUME ITS TRADITIONAL ROLE OF LEADERSHIP UNTIL CONFIDENCE IS RESTORED. COMPLICATING MATTERS IS THE FACT THAT THE PUBLIC SECTOR IS NOT IN A POSITION TO DO THE JOB. THERE ARE ONLY A HANDFUL OF COMPETENT CIVIL SERVANTS. MOST CIVIL SERVANTS ARE BADLY TRAINED AND OWE THEIR JOBS TO POLITICAL PATRONAGE.

14. ONE CAN ENVISAGE THE CREATION OF A SPECIAL OFFICE DIRECTLY UNDER THE PRESIDENT TO PLAN AND COORDINATE THE REBUILDING OF THE COUNTRY. A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF WESTERN KNOW-HOW WILL BE REQUIRED AND LARGE AMOUNTS OF LOW INTEREST, LONG-TERM CREDIT, PRESUMABLY FROM THE ARAB COUNTRIES, PERHAPS \$1-2 BILLION AS A STARTER.

15. THE CONCEPT OF WESTERN KNOW-HOW JOINED WITH ARAB CAPITAL LENDS ITSELF WELL TO THE FORMATION OF A CONSORTIUM, THE MEMBERS OF WHICH WOULD OF COURSE HAVE TO BE SELECTED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF EXISTING POLITICAL REALITIES, WHICH MEANS THE INCLUSION OF SYRIA REGARDLESS OF THE LATTER'S DEARTH OF CAPITAL AND/OR WESTERN KNOW-HOW.

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03493 03 OF 03 201409Z

42

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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 3 OF 3 BEIRUT 3493

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16. THE PUBLIC SECTOR EFFORT, IT MUST BE STRESSED, WOULD SUPPLEMENT, OR REPLACE, THE PRIVATE SECTOR EFFORT. ALMOST ALL OF THE COUNTRY'S NOT INCONSIDERABLE

TALENT IS FOUND IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR. WHAT IS NEEDED IS AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF CREDIT UNDER FAVORABLE TERMS. ALSO NEEDED ARE GUARANTEES, GOVERNMENT GUARANTEES OR INSURANCE THAT THE COST OF THE OFFICE BUILDING RE-BUILT OR THE INVENTORIES REPLENISHED WOULD BE COVERED IF ONCE MORE DESTROYED. GOVERNMENT GUARANTEES ARE OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE TO INDUSTRY. NOT ONLY SHOULD LAWS BE PASSED TO GUARANTEE THE FOREIGN INVESTOR, BUT THE LEBANESE INVESTOR AS WELL.

17. INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM FOR JOINT COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO SECTORS. THIS HAS ALREADY EXISTED IN THE CASE OF TOURISM, BUT THE STATE'S ROLE IN PROVIDING THE NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE TO ALLOW FOR REAL INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, AND SEEING TO IT THAT THIS IS NOT ALL CONCENTRATED IN BEIRUT, HAS EXISTED ON PAPER ONLY.

18. WHETHER BEIRUT WILL BECOME ONCE MORE A REGIONAL FINANCIAL CENTER WILL DEPEND NOT ONLY ON SECURITY BUT ON THE CONTINUATION OF A LIBERAL STYLE ECONOMY, THE ABSENCE OF CONTROLS ON CAPITAL MOVEMENTS AND MAINTENANCE OF THE BANK SECRECY LAWS. INDEED THE WHOLE RENEWAL OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR COULD ONLY BE ASSUMED IF THE COUNTRY CONTINUES TO FUNCTION UNDER

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03493 03 OF 03 201409Z

A FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM.

19. IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ROAD CONSTRUCTION AND PORT DEVELOPMENT REQUIRE PRIORITY AS AN AID TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR, BUT THE PUBLIC SECTOR WILL ALSO HAVE PRESSING PRIORITIES OF A SOCIAL NATURE. THESE INCLUDE SUBSIDIZED HOUSING, MORE SCHOOLS, AND AN END TO TAX EVASION ON THE PART OF THE WEALTHY.

20. IN THE MIDST OF ALL THE DESTRUCTION TO THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY THE RELATIVE STABILITY OF THE LEVANESE POUND IS ONE OF THE BRIGHT SPOTS. THANKS TO A VERY CONSERVATIVE POLICY FOLLOWED SINCE THE INTRA BANK CRAS ROCKED THE COUNTRY, THE POUND HAS AN 80 PER CENT GOLD COVER AT THE OFFICIAL RATE OF \$42 PER OUNCE. MOREOVER THE LEBANESE PUBLIC DEBT IS NEGLIGIBLE. LEBANON'S ABILITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO HELPING ITSELF THEREFORE IS BY NO MEANS INSIGNIFICANT.

21. A MAJOR EFFORT BY THE PUBLIC SECTOR TO RESTORE THE ECONOMY, IT SHOULD BE NOTED, WOULD TEND TO STRENGTHEN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND WORK AGAINST TRENDS TOWARD PARTITION.

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